

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release July 25, 1973

Carroll 202/343-5634

DUCK PRODUCTION OUTLOOK POOR AS NESTING HABITAT REPORTED DRY

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel Reed, who heads the Department's programs for fish, wildlife, and parks, said today that prospects are poor for waterfowl production this summer as aerial survey crews have reported a decline in the number of breeding ducks and in the quality of wetland habitat.

Surveys of conditions for waterfowl are undertaken each year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and Ducks Unlimited, a private organization, in the duck breeding areas of the north-central United States and southern Canada.

These surveys provide data upon which the Nation's fall waterfowl hunting regulations are based.

"We will know more about the overall outlook when a follow-up study of breeding success is completed this month," Reed said, noting that survey crews have reported population shifts away from drier locations in some areas.

Recently completed surveys show a 38 percent decrease in the number of prairie potholes, and many of the remaining potholes have declined in quality. Potholes are glacier-formed ponds and lakes which, with the right combination of water and vegetation, provide ideal duck nesting habitat.

In the important breeding areas of southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, Montana and the Dakotas, potholes are 20 to 50 percent fewer than last year. Potholes in the southern prairie Provinces numbered 2.2 million last May, compared with 3.5 million in 1972 and 3.9 million in 1971. In Alberta, however, the number of potholes is about the same.

The decline is attributed to changes in precipitation patterns. Snowfall was light this past winter in the prairie pothole country of the Dakota's, western Minnesota, eastern Montana, much of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Consequently, habitat is dry in the best "duck-factory" land. Heavy April snows and above normal spring rainfall in some areas, particularly the more northerly parklands, should help prevent further decreases in number of potholes.